

The Catholic Church
and the
Catholic Man



By CHARLES FRANCIS CARTER

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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

AND THE

CATHOLIC MAN

A Sermon preached by

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Introduction.

This sermon, preached at a union service of Congregational and Unitarian societies, met with such sympathetic and spontaneous commendation from members of both churches, that the undersigned have interested themselves in securing its wider circulation in this form, believing that its careful reading will stimulate the growing desire for unity in the broader purposes of religion, not only in this community but elsewhere.

GEORGE O. WHITING,
EDWARD P. NICHOLS,
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The Catholic Church and the Catholic Man.



Acts 17: 26.—And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth. . . .

The subject directs our thought, not to the Church of Rome which for so many centuries has borne the name catholic, almost to the point of monopoly, but to that other church, the church of the future, which the eye of man hath not seen, but which every devout heart hath conceived ever since the time when Christ prayed the Father "that they all may be one." For there is a sentiment, deep in the soul of man, impelling him to look forward with hope and desire to the time when this prayer shall be realized and all men be one in the unity of faith.

The divisions of Christendom that often so manifestly spring from pettiness and sadly interfere with efficiency are irksome to the sensitive soul, while the differences that hinder fellowship among the members of the family of God are a manifest reproach. Against all estrangement and lack of knowledge and sympathy among brethren

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the Christian heart protests. The Master would not have it so. The Father can not gladly see it so.

The subject appeals to us, to-day, moreover, because of the circumstances under which we meet. Two churches, as they are commonly called, but more correctly two branches of one denomination, unite in this mutual service as has been our cordial custom for two years past. Doubtless the friendly relations existing in the community have something to do with the nature of our gathering, beside the fact that in the history of these two local bodies there has never been any pronounced antagonism. Yet are we not justified in feeling, also, that our coming together in this way has something more than local significance, that it is one of the signs of the growing disposition toward harmony and fraternity which is apparent in so many quarters among religious people? In every church hands are reaching forth for fellowship with brethren of other names.

This profound sentiment is being re-enforced by the practical spirit of the present day. The principle of organization and co-operation has too deeply affected the conduct of business life to be much longer over-looked in its application to relig-

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ious enterprise. Earnest men will not long be content to win success in the field of commerce without insisting that the principle leading to this success be applied as far as practicable to the administration of church life. The religious institution must not be belated in its methods. Especially must it not fall under the reproach of showing less of that spirit of co-operation than appears in the conduct of material concerns when its own underlying motive so strongly demands the sense of fellowship. If men of greed can work together to secure their common ends how much more readily should men stand shoulder to shoulder in whom there is a common impulse of love and devotion to one head. Thus the long-cherished sentiment and the motive of efficiency are beginning to coincide. Ideally and practically, the demand is unmistakable that the church be one.

This ideal rests on the principle which Paul mentioned in the text. God hath made all men of one blood and one spirit. Mankind is homogeneous. There are differences of color and variations of type, but in essential quality man is the same the world over. Fundamentally the factors that enter into life are the same in Massachusetts and Australia; and the problem is the

same. Yes, and the solution is to come from the same source. For the same God is over all, the same truth is open to all, and essentially the same obligations devolve on all, a lie being as wrong and a deed of self-sacrifice as praiseworthy on one meridian as on another.

Hence the great principle stands before us that there are no proprietary rights in morality, truth or religion. No man has any warrant to draw a circle of exclusion around the area of faith in which he stands, and by word or deed fence out his neighbor. Precisely the opposite attitude is incumbent on him. He must strive to make room there for his fellow-man, for faith is essentially out-going, self-propagating, and inclusive. We break faith with humanity whenever, by any article of belief or practice of religion, we assume a posture of dictation or imply some special credential of authority as attaching to ourselves. Had men remembered this principle the Christian centuries would have written a nobler history.

The various sects and denominations have been the over-abundant crop from the wide sowing of the seed of individualism. The principle involved is sound that each man is directly responsible to God. He must be himself, must stand on his own feet, must think according to

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the constitution of his mind, must entertain feelings native and congenial, and he is free to follow his own purposes. But he has no right to forget that he is of one blood and one spirit with all other men and that he must not violate the common nature. He has no right to erect his notions in their special forms into tests for other men, however stout the approval of conscience may be in the holding of his opinion. His individuality may not exceed its bounds lest it transgress another individuality equally sacred.

The counterbalance to an excessive individualism appears in the recognition of our common humanity, and this becomes both a limitation and a guide in the development of ourselves. We fail of our best unless that best is attained in terms that give it value for our fellows. It is with life as with the organ. Here are hundreds of pipes, each one having its own peculiar quality and pitch. Take any one of them you will. The tuner voices it and gives it such a pitch that it is unlike every other pipe in the entire instrument. Its note is all its own and has no duplicate. The same is true of each and every other one, though there be thousands of them.

Here is individuality indeed! Yet each pipe is tuned and voiced with reference to every other

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and if this law of fitness to the community in which it stands and the part it has to subserve in the unity of the instrument were disregarded in any single case it would produce a blemish in the whole effect. Musically it would be an outrage, not to be tolerated. The individual, likewise, must know himself one member in the human organism, else his self-hood becomes intrusion and defect.

The realm of truth within which each mind operates is the same for all and in harmony with itself. My note, though it be mine, must be in scale with yours. The great purpose within which any man takes his personal initiative constitutes the plan of the universe and the fundamental forces are not contrary to each other. Consequently the feelings, even, proverbially admitted to be outside the pale of reconciling argument, the feelings that attach to ones own interests are really thrills and surface waves on the tides of still deeper emotions, swelling with the sense of participation in some mighty project of God. The warrant of a true individuality is not the warrant for any man to think or do just as he pleases and then by a set-screw of conscientiousness to fix this as a standard for other men. Rather does it carry the obligation to be such a

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man as will represent the one blood and exemplify the spirit common to all.

Because men are thus fitted to each other in their deepest life the Catholic Church is a possibility. It means that some day religious interests will be so organized as to make manifest this fundamental fact. The Catholic Church will be such an ordering of the religious community that all men will be ministered to according to their special needs, while all will work together for the common purpose of the kingdom of God. There will be diversity of needs and powers, with unity of spirit. Differences will be recognized as units of value, while each will make his own note good by keeping in tune with the common standard. This will be the organization of humanity in the interest of religion, which will prove to be equally the organization of religion in the interest of humanity.

If this ideal is to be realized, it must be through those who stand in the community for the religious motive. The Catholic Church requires the Catholic Man. Such an one accepts his life as one who is responsible for a new expression of an already established type. The truth which he believes and personally embodies is one which his neighbor will appreciate and by which he may be

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convinced. The religion he espouses is to be in terms fitted to become current throughout humanity.

When Michael Angelo set himself to produce such a statue as that of Moses he became engaged in a work of artistic creation, and the form that emerged from the marble under the blows of his mallet and his mind was entirely new to the world of art. Nothing like it had before been seen and it stirred men with fresh sensations. Yet with all its originality it suggested no other type than that with which men were perfectly familiar. Any mark of eccentricity would have been at once condemned as a blemish and defect. It is the new comment on the well-known text that wins a hearing for the artist,—creation not *de novo* but within limits already fixed and accepted.

Manhood's spiritual opportunity is of a similar order. The eccentrics do not enrich their fellows, but they who combine fair, human traits in new and winning harmonies, they whose chiseling of life by the steadfast strokes of earnest purpose brings to light some fore-gleams of the normal man and sets the ideal in bolder relief. It is not what separates a man from others that makes him either great or serviceable, but what he has in common with them. This is the spirit of the

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catholic man who feels constrained so to hold his religion that he can prove it good, not only for himself, but in terms of the experience of other men, and so commend the grace wherein he stands.

This view yields some general characterizations of the catholic man. First, and most important of all, he will hold his faith in the strength of personal conviction. If he is to enrich other men by contributing a spiritual unit of real worth, he must greatly believe. His own life must lay hold on that realm out of which the deep things come. If he is to stand for religion, religion must stand to him as important beyond all else. It is not by an easy-going, indiscriminating license of mind that men become factors in human progress, but by seeing some pole-star of faith, traversing highways of truth and by being rooted and grounded in God. Was it not Goethe, so notably tolerant and catholic, who urged men: "Tell me what you believe. I have doubts enough of my own." The earnest believer will use his life to demonstrate his faith, and language to explain, interpret and commend it but never to enforce it upon another mind. Alas for the syllogism that in the supposed interest of religion so often has been turned into a club: "If you don't be-

lieve as I do, you can't be saved; and I can prove it!"

This catholic man, however, will not be less earnest than any member of the Inquisition, though he will show his spirit in a different way. One is sometimes asked, in connection with union services like this, "Don't you think that people are growing less strict than they were?" Undoubtedly the answer must be Yes. Yet often one must raise the finger of warning lest this condition be regarded as an unmitigated blessing. There is a lack of strictness that is utterly to be deplored. If it means less force of conviction, a decline in the sense of moral obligation, an indiscriminate hospitality to all ideas that may be current, then it is far from good. It is no sign of progress.

If there is any charge of over-strictness to be laid at the door of past generations it is not that morality was too rigorous but that the way of fixing the moral label was too formal and external, this practice being approved as "right" and that tabooed as "wrong." The discipline of our forefathers was not far astray in its rigorous training of the will, even though it lacked insight and held too slight faith in the significance and purity of the individual motive. The gain, if there be one,

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is not to be found in increased laxity, either moral or intellectual, but in a finer order of thought and a more exacting requirement.

There is a strictness of outward conformity and a strictness of inner motive; and between these there is a world of difference. Here are two men who would draw a line. One takes a ruler, lays it on the page, and draws his pen along the edge of it. The book-keeper has made his mark. The other takes his pencil, looks upon the paper, broods over it with quiet meditation, has in mind the meaning of the line before it leaves the pencil tip, and then the transfer to the paper is made with concentration of feeling, definiteness of purpose and unswerving exactitude. It was the touch that only the artist knows.

Which line was the more strictly drawn? Rulers are useful, yet men cannot use them when they want the finest product. They must learn the patience of the line drawn without the ruler, the insight needful, the purpose that controls the subtlest variation, the effect to be produced in the picture. And this is life in its strictness, not conformity to outward requirements, save as they help and further the worthy purpose, but an exacting expression, a precise setting forth of the inner motive that one cherishes in the sight of

God. The catholic man will draw the line of holy intent, and his will be the strictness that "fears a lapse of faith or duty."

Coupled with the spirit of uncompromising devotion to principle, the catholic man will hold his faith in the modesty of his own limited mind. There are two traits that carry self-condemnation with them. One appears in the man who seems to say "I am holier than thou." The assumption and parade of virtue is everywhere the sign of the Pharisee, and nothing so thoroughly disqualifies one from exerting moral influence over his fellows. The other trait, kindred and equally incongruous, gives the impression that "my religious intelligence I deem superior to yours." This sin of presumption has two forms, disclosing an evil likeness in men who deem themselves exceedingly far apart.

We have all heard the man who speaks as if the correctness of his religious thought were guaranteed past all question of doubt. Of the great revelation given to the world he has a peculiarly authentic copy. His plain understanding of the bible is the real meaning of the bible. The plan of salvation is to him a clear and definite scheme, and the one who does not see it so is certainly astray in his judgment or perverse in his will.

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This man deems his attitude to be the simplicity of faith. It is really the pride of a narrow intellect, and it carries a savour of conceit that in a larger mind would be abhorrent.

Another man, also, we have seen. He lightly brushes away the creeds as outworn; he reminds us that nobody believes as men were wont to do; he sweeps aside theology as a confusion of tongues; with little sympathy for the childhood of the race, forgetting his own parentage in the glory of the new day, he cuts loose from history, and with a miserable spirit of patronage looks down on his belated brethren. His is the pride of the liberal, worse than that of the bigot because he ought to know better. Neither of these men would I have you hate or despise, unless you find them in your own breast. There is the field for deadly hatred. The truth each mind may grasp, one hue of the vast iridescence, much as it means to him, is brother to all the truth there is, one ray of the pure white light. To realize this is to win the grace of the finite mind.

The catholic man, through his grace of humility, becomes with others a comrade of truth. He is eager to give and eager to receive. He believes in himself, knowing that his faith goes to the making of life, and because he has in himself this

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constant demonstration of the value of truth, he is predisposed to believe in his neighbor. If he can make his own life known to another in connection with the sources that fertilize it, he will enrich that other life: If the other's heart of goodness may be disclosed to him, it will be an added chapter in the book of spiritual revelation. By his bearing he says, "It is as important for me to understand you as for you to understand me." Being an adherent of truth for the soul's sake, he is a believer in the potency of truth in other minds, and he strives to make human counsel availing to the high ends of the spirit.

All this means that catholicity breeds an atmosphere finer than that of mere toleration. Every unit of genuine faith and spiritual insight enriches the world. The truth of any institution, as well as the truth in any individual's belief, when rightly understood, is far in excess of the error involved. This is the reason why we are enabled with genuine sympathy to unite with the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world in mourning for the Pope, and in revering his memory, whose character and conduct in high office have been so exemplary and beneficent. It is not because we overlook what seems to us the serious error in the polity of that communion in attaching so slight importance

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to the exercise of individual reason, but because we appreciate the value of her distinctive characteristic in making direct and insistent appeal to the human will, constantly addressing herself to this citadel of the moral nature, and thus developing a power of obedience and reverence for authority that constitute the church of Rome an inestimable factor for good in the development of humanity. A confident belief in the power of truth to overcome the limitations of error leads us to appreciate the critical importance of the pontiff's death and to pray that the future of this great historic church may be even still more serviceable to the fundamental human need for which she stands.

This spirit of genuine interest in the well-being of the Roman Church should operate toward all bodies of men who are earnestly engaged to maintain the strength, purity, and progress of religion. The sects and denominations that so often tend to irritate us are entitled to the same catholic regard, even though they do not conspicuously show this grace themselves, and in spite of the fact that our theological antagonisms are intensified inversely to the distance between those who hold opposing views. The gall of theological difference oftenest embitters members of the same ecclesiastical household.

We may be assured that no considerable movement among men can be strong because of its error. Commingled with hide-bound prejudice there is appeal to what is worthy and deep. And the catholic man seeks to understand others and to appreciate from the human and spiritual point of view, movements differing from the one with which he is most closely allied. Sometimes even he may understand and appraise narrow movements better than the partisans themselves. As one has said: "Paul could understand Peter, but Peter couldn't understand Paul."

A discerning catholicity admits nothing to be alien to itself that has significance for the spiritual progress of man. Hence it seeks to interpret all convictions in relation to the life they help nourish and it reads all periods of religious history not so much in the light of their present error as in the light of their contemporary truth and spiritual impulse, thus maintaining a true conservatism as it keeps the air clear for progress, free and sane.

In all this growing disposition toward a more comprehensive faith, it is significant that there has been a shifting of emphasis from dogma to life. It is not altogether what men think that determines their religion, but even more the spirit of their thinking and what they think about. One

may even happen to have known men who were thinking a great deal about God who would avow themselves as doubting the existence of God, and yet such men of earnest concern about the nature of the supreme and central source of life may be more distinctly religious than many who accept a large body of traditional belief and with the acceptance give God little heed.

Again, concerning Jesus and the spiritual value that he has for men, it is not necessary that men agree in their intellectual interpretation of him, not nearly so necessary that they accept the same theory of what he was, as it is that their thoughts and feelings so center in him as to hold them in real fellowship and growing understanding of his person.

Now I deem it exceedingly important to have a philosophy of life as thorough-going as it may be and a right theory of the person of Christ, yet if I find a man, who in the habitual conduct of his life makes me feel the spirit of Christ, I take him for my Christian brother whatever be his theory or lack of it. The door of the kingdom does not swing on the hinge of theory. It opens to the man who is sincerely and earnestly following the light he has. It is this subordination of the intel-

lectual process to the total bent and purpose of the man that is tending to a finer catholicity and a heartier fellowship in the things of the spirit.

Men are learning that spiritual relations reveal identities of character and act as unifying forces. The central fact of religion is God. One may not approach Him on any radius without drawing nearer to every one who from his point on the wide-extended rim of human apprehension has been moving nearer to the same center. The central fact of historic Christianity is Jesus Christ. I cannot imagine a man living as a personal friend of Jesus Christ and sharing his spirit without also being at home in the presence of God; and I cannot conceive a man being right with God who would not also be on good terms with Jesus Christ if he should meet him. The way, also, in which we give a cup of cold water to the least of Christ's brethren,—and there were none whom he excluded from his love,—gives sign of our relation to him, while the purpose to do the will of God leads Christ to count us his brothers and sisters.

In these spiritual relations there is something involved amounting to an axiom. Things that are equal to the same thing are equal to each other.

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Characters allied to the same character are allied to each other. Persons at one with the same person are virtually at one with each other. This is a law that holds throughout the realm of souls. At no one point exclusively is the test applied, but wherever occasion arises for truth-speaking, for right-doing and for loving-kindness, there the soul proclaims itself and the day of judgment comes. It is the quality of life that signifies. The character of the personal relationships that we habitually sustain yields the credential of our worth and reveals the underlying unity in which we stand ; and it is this unity that counts in the kingdom of God. Yea, the unity of truth and righteousness and love constitutes that kingdom divine, wherever it be named, in heaven or on earth.

A new church is being formed in this our country. No mention of it is in the newspapers. No discussion has arisen over the name it shall bear. Its members are in every denomination, passing back and forth over all boundary lines. They know each other by three signs : they have convictions which they are trying to realize ; they are not sure they know all the truth ; they are eager to learn what the other man has proven good.

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These are the catholic men who help on the coming of the Catholic Church. When Hancock Church yonder was being built, men searched the fields for stones that should fitly find place in its walls. And the world is being searched today for men who shall be as living stones in the structure of the Church that is to be, and the cement that shall bind them is composed of faith and love.